

RESPECTED REPUBLICAN PULLING AWAY FROM THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION ON WAR IN IRAQ

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, an influential Republican voice on foreign affairs admitted that the war in Iraq is doing more harm than good and that, I quote, "Our course in Iraq has lost contact with our vital national security interests in the Middle East and beyond."

Those are the words of Republican Senator RICHARD LUGAR of Indiana, who went to the Senate floor last night to say that changes in strategy need to be made before September. LUGAR's comments should be listened to very carefully by my Republican colleagues who continue to hold out hope that the President's troop escalation strategy can work.

Senator LUGAR is just the latest to admit that the President's plan is not working and that a new strategy is needed in Iraq. Last week, General Petraeus himself said that we will not meet the target of seeing any positive results from the troop escalation plan by September.

Now, Senator LUGAR's realistic assessment of the war in Iraq is commendable, but words are simply not enough. If LUGAR is convinced that the war in Iraq is no longer in our Nation's best interest, he must join us in finding an alternative that begins to bring our troops home.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF MARINE SERGEANT SHAWN MARTIN

(Mr. McNULTY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to salute and pay tribute to the memory of Marine Sergeant Shawn Martin, who gave his life in service to his country in Iraq. He died on June 20. His funeral will be on Thursday morning.

Sergeant Martin's death is a reminder to all of us that, regardless of how we feel about this particular war, that young men and women across our country put on the uniform of the United States military and are willing to go anywhere in the world at the direction of our government to protect American interests.

It reminds me not to let even a single day go by without remembering with deepest gratitude all of those who, like my own brother, Bill, made the supreme sacrifice, all those like Shawn who made the supreme sacrifice, and all of those who serve in the military with great honor and then come back home, render outstanding service in the community and raise beautiful families to carry on their fine traditions. These are the things that I'm most grateful for today as a citizen of the United States of America.

So today I extend my deepest sympathies to Shawn's wife, to his parents, to all the members of his family for his tremendous service to our country for making the supreme sacrifice, and we shall never forget this true American hero.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2643, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 514 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 514

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2643) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived except those arising under clause 9 or 10 of rule XXI. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. Points of order against provisions in the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI are waived. During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the Congressional Record designated for that purpose in clause 8 of rule XVIII. Amendments so printed shall be considered as read. When the committee rises and reports the bill back to the House with a recommendation that the bill do pass, the previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

SEC. 2. During consideration in the House of H.R. 2643 pursuant to this resolution, notwithstanding the operation of the previous question, the Chair may postpone further consideration of the bill to such time as may be designated by the Speaker.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Washington, my namesake and good friend, Mr. HASTINGS. All time yielded during consideration of the rule is for debate only.

I yield myself such time as I may consume.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I also ask unanimous consent

that all Members be given 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on House Resolution 514.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 514 provides for consideration of H.R. 2643, the Department of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2008. It is an open rule, and allows all Members the opportunity to amend the bill.

□ 1030

Mr. Speaker, the funding levels in the underlying bill make clear the change in priorities of this new Democratic Congress. This bill refocuses our Nation's priorities to ensure that all Americans have access to clean water and air as well as appropriately addressing climate change and conservation, all of which have not been seen since Democrats last controlled this body in 1994. Democrats are restoring our obligation to the American people to protect and preserve the land and shores and all creatures who inhabit this Earth.

I commend Chairman DICKS and Representative TIAHRT for their hard and, perhaps most importantly, bipartisan work on this legislation. I do believe that they did a tremendous job in crafting this bill.

This bill restores our promise to America's underserved minority communities and to our children to ensure that our cherished land, water, and air will be preserved for generations to come. I commend the committee for including funding for important environmental justice programs I have long advocated for such as \$1.1 billion for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. This is \$437 million above the administration's request and will help over 150 communities with drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

The bill also includes \$140 million for sewer and water grants, which received zero funding in 2007 and was not in the President's budget request this year. Further, this legislation provides \$16 million for rural water technical assistance that was also zeroed out in the President's budget request. We are ensuring that all communities have clean and safe drinking water.

The underlying legislation also includes limitation language that I authored in the 109th Congress, ensuring that EPA respects the needs of environmental justice communities. It appropriate \$7 million for environmental justice programs, the amount that Congresswoman HILDA SOLIS, I, and others requested. This is \$3 million over the administration's budget request and \$2 million over fiscal 2007 levels.

This bill provides much-needed funding for our national parks and wildlife protection. The legislation includes \$2.5 billion for our national parks, \$223 million above the 2007 levels.

Democrats are appropriating \$1.4 billion for the Fish and Wildlife Service, \$86 million above 2007 levels and \$130 million above the President's budget request.

Ladies and gentlemen, our national parks have been shortchanged for too long. This funding will be used for critical maintenance and repair, conservation, and recreation, and for the preservation of our natural heritage.

Importantly, the underlying legislation maintains the longstanding Presidential and congressional moratoria on drilling for natural gas on the Outer Continental Shelf. The committee rightly rejected attempts to permit drilling to occur off the shores of coastal States, including my home State of Florida, and I am sure my colleague from Tampa (Ms. CASTOR) will speak more specifically to that issue during her time on the rule. In doing this, we continue to protect and preserve the health of Florida's beaches and tourism industry, the largest industry in our State.

Amendments may be offered today on the floor that will seek to strip Florida and other coastal States of their protections. I urge all of my colleagues to do what is right for our Nation and reject such amendments. Drilling for natural gas on the Outer Continental Shelf will have zero impact at the gas pumps. It will not under any circumstances reduce the cost of a gallon of gasoline.

This legislation offers a more forward thinking approach to our Nation's energy needs. Instead of looking for short-term, short-sighted solutions, Democrats have a smarter, long-term energy strategy. For starters, Democrats have increased funding for programs such as the global climate change research, providing \$10 million above the President's request for new research on global climate change and its impact on rivers, groundwaters, and on organisms.

The bill also increases our investment in energy conservation and alternative fuels and research capabilities by nearly 60 percent. What a difference a change in Congress does make for our Nation.

Critically important to my district and to the entire State of Florida is restoration of America's Everglades, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world and a unique and world-renowned eco-region. The Everglades is one of the Nation's most fragile ecosystems and remains an area of national and international significance. Increased funding to advance this restoration initiative ensures that the Federal Government keeps its commitment to the River of Grass, the largest environmental rescue in the world. Chairman DICKS and Representative TAYLOR, in my judgment, should both be applauded for their continued effort to restore and preserve this pristine ecosystem.

Democrats also take significant steps to finally work to fulfill our promise to our neglected Native American com-

munities. In all, the bill provides almost \$250 million more in funding for Native American health care and education opportunities than last year.

This legislation truly provides for each and every one of us. By investing in the health of America's natural resources, we are investing in the future of this majestic country.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, later today I intend to offer an amendment that would designate \$1 million for grants for the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, the only national program dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of underground railroad history. I urge my colleagues to support this important amendment.

I am pleased to support this rule and the underlying bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend and namesake, Mr. HASTINGS, for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. HASTINGS of Washington asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, the Rules Committee heard testimony nearly 2 weeks ago from my good friend and colleague from Washington, Subcommittee Chairman NORM DICKS and the Ranking Member TODD TIAHRT of Kansas. When they appeared before the Rules Committee, concerns were raised that the bill at that time did not include a list of earmarks or earmark sponsors and that no Member could challenge, discuss, and call for a vote on earmarks on the House floor.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, Republicans succeeded in forcing the Democrat majority to restore the earmark transparency and enforceability rules that they had changed at the beginning of this Congress, and now spending bills are being brought to the floor with earmarks where they can be discussed, debated, and voted upon, as they should be.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the fiscal year 2008 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill that we will consider today contains a list of earmarks and the names of the sponsors of those earmarks. This means that Members will have the opportunity to review them before casting their vote on the House floor and not just see them added months from now, as was previously tried.

Mr. Speaker, the Central Washington area that I represent covers more than 19,000 square miles, much of which is controlled and managed by the Federal Government. The Federal agencies funded in this bill directly impact those that I represent on a number of levels. When storms and mudslides wipe out trails and roads, it affects not only my constituents that enjoy camping, hiking, and hunting on public

roads, but also visitors to the area and the local businesses that rely on tourism. When invasive species, plant pests, and wildfire threats are not adequately controlled on Federal land, the problems do not stop at the property line.

I think I speak for many Western Members of the House when I talk about the huge stake we have in the general direction of the agencies funded under this bill. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that at a time when Federal land agencies struggle to manage the land they now have, this Congress would provide tens of millions of dollars for the Federal Government to buy up more land. This takes private property off the tax rolls and leaves county governments with a heavier burden to pay for emergency services, roads, and schools.

I have stood on this floor before to discuss the importance of another program, the Secure Rural Schools program, which compensates local governments that are negatively affected by Federal forest land policy and ownership and the virtual shutdown of the Federal timber program over the last 15 years. We need to get the Secure Rural Schools program reauthorized and we need to get the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program fully funded for the long term before we start spending millions of dollars adding more and more land to the Federal estate.

Finally, I want to express my concern about the overall increase in spending that this bill represents. I know that the chairman of the subcommittee and the ranking member worked very hard to try to manage the many demands for funding under this bill. However, this bill represents a \$680 million increase over last year. As I have said previously with respect to other appropriation bills this year, we simply must rein in spending in order to prevent the massive tax increases that the Democrat majority is poised to impose, as reflected in their budget.

Congress must work for balancing the Federal budget in 5 years. There are two ways to balance the budget, whether it is your family budget or the Federal budget. You can either, one, reduce the amount of money being spent or, two, increase the amount coming in. This bill highlights the Democrat majority's allegiance to option number two: spending more money each and every year and at a rate faster than inflation, while relying on tax increases to balance the budget down the road.

Mr. Speaker, we don't need a bigger Federal Government. We need a balanced approach that holds the line on spending; provides for our Nation's most fundamental priorities; and allows taxpayers to keep more of their hard-earned money to spend, save, and invest as they see fit.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased at this time to yield 6 minutes to my good friend

and member of the Rules Committee, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CASTOR).

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS), who has been an outspoken advocate for environmental justice for this great country and a strong supporter of Everglades restoration. So I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, our natural environment and clean neighborhoods are vital to the health of the folks that we represent back home. This bill, and the rule, contains much to recommend it to the American people. But I rise in support today because my community, the Tampa Bay area, will benefit greatly due to the new investments being made under the leadership of this new Democratic Congress.

See, our communities have suffered over past years while environmental agencies were infiltrated by industry lobbyists. That was a strategy of this White House, unfortunately. And some in past Congresses whittled away at environmental protections.

□ 1045

Well, we're going to begin to turn that around today and repair America's natural environment and the public health so we can breathe easier.

First, we will make new investments in clean air and clean and safe drinking water. We know that the rate of asthma in children is rising in America, and this bill will help our communities get back on track with enforcement of the Clean Air Act.

On clean water, the residents of the cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg have benefited greatly over the years due to the Clean Water Act and the State Water Revolving Loan Program because my communities have been able to repair sewers, and in my hometown, clean up Tampa Bay and make it safer for swimming, boating, and fishing. But we have more work to do. The National Estuary Program portion of this bill will help, as the bill provides greater assistance to local communities to improve water quality in our national estuaries like Tampa Bay.

I also hope the committee will look favorably upon an amendment relating to the red tide that is affecting the physical environment of our coastal communities and causing respiratory ailments at a time when folks are trying to enjoy their vacation at the beach.

Urban communities like mine also need assistance in cleaning up toxic waste sites and Superfund sites. As a former county commissioner back home, I understand the value of cleaning up old brownfield sites so they do not remain as blights on the community. Oftentimes these polluted industrial sites are located in communities of modest means. So I salute the committee and Chairman DICKS for his commitment to environmental justice to ensure that environmental decisions do not adversely affect minority populations.

This bill also charts a new direction on global warming as well by increasing climate change scientific research, including attention to coastal communities to help us determine how we can best adapt to a warming planet.

This act and rule also provides long overdue funding for our national parks, including the beautiful Florida Everglades. Thanks to Chairman DICKS and the committee for stepping up our efforts to ensure that these valuable environmental resources are protected.

One final issue: this bill maintains the long-standing moratoria on oil and gas drilling off our beautiful gulf coast beaches. Now, I expect that the oil and gas lobby will take a run at this protection today, and I urge my colleagues to hold firm.

In Florida and in other coastal States, drilling threatens our environment, it threatens our health, and it threatens our economic livelihood. Instead of risking our critical coastline for short-term gain, the new Democratic majority is pursuing a long-term energy strategy by investing in energy conservation and alternative fuels.

Granting oil and gas leases and access to our coastline is not the solution to our energy crisis. The current leases that oil and gas companies exploit far off the coastline exist with the help of taxpayers. Allowing drilling closer to our coastline is simply a way for oil and gas companies to maximize their profits. Such actions will have no effect on either the cost of gas or on the future of our energy needs.

I urge my colleagues to beat back this scheme of the oil and gas lobby today, their attempt to kill a ban on coastal drilling that was enacted in response to a 1969 oil and gas bill that blackened 35 miles of California's coast.

Instead of drilling for limited resources, the country needs an accelerated program for alternative fuels, and Congress needs to investigate the oil companies' unseemly profits.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation and the rule. I salute the leadership of Chairman DICKS, and I thank Ranking Member TIAHRT. This legislation will protect our environment and our public health and focus on renewable energy solutions that are vital to the State of Florida and the future of our great Nation.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, at this time I'm pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER).

(Mr. NEUGEBAUER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the American taxpayers in opposition to this rule.

A couple of weeks ago we had a lot of debate on this floor about earmarks. At the end of this agreement we were able to have a process that's more open and transparent for the earmark process, and so that was a victory for the American taxpayer. However, it's

worth noting that when you look at the spending, for example in 2005, earmark spending was less than 1 percent. So even though the battle was won on earmarks, the war is still on against overspending of the American taxpayers' money.

There are many causes for overspending in this country today, and one of those is the entitlement programs. Those are programs, unfortunately, that this body doesn't even get to vote on. And the fact that the new majority's budget now has an additional discretionary spending of \$20 billion does not help the spending problem at all.

I would argue that Congress is failing at another very important issue as well. According to a CQ Weekly article recently, \$100 billion in appropriations this year that we will make aren't authorized. Now, the American people know what "authorized" means. If you go down and open up a checking account, people want to know if you're authorized to sign on that account. If you get a credit card, certain people are authorized to use the credit card. I wish we were using a checking account for the American taxpayers, but unfortunately we're using a credit card.

What we're going to have in this bill today, the Interior EPA appropriations bill, is \$7.29 billion that's not authorized. What does that mean? That means that the committees of jurisdiction have chosen either not to authorize this spending or to reauthorize this spending, yet the appropriation process is going to go ahead and spend \$7.29 billion of the American taxpayers' money. Let me tell you where some of that unauthorized money is going to be distributed; \$160 million to the National Endowment of the Arts was last authorized and it expired in 1993. The authorization for this expired in 1993. \$1.8 billion of discretionary programs for the Bureau of Land Management. That authorization expired in 2002. \$10.5 million for EPA State and Tribal Grants to Alaskan Native Villages. Authorization for this spending expired in 1979. These projects aren't on autopilot. In fact, there is not even a pilot in the cockpit. These are programs that no one has chosen to reauthorize in a number of years.

As Members of Congress, we're entrusted to spend the taxpayers' money wisely. Congress is supposed to continually review these policies and programs to determine, one, are they working; secondly, do they need to be improved; or, third, should they be eliminated altogether.

Get this: House rules require appropriations to go through the authorization program, yet each year the Rules Committee chooses to waive points of order authorizing spending. In other words, that means we have rules in this House to protect the American taxpayer by saying we're not going to fund projects that aren't authorized. But what is the first action that we take? We waive the rules. This is a practice

both Republican and Democratic Congresses are guilty of. However, I think it's important to point out this shortcoming as we go into this very important legislative process.

Now, some might argue, well, Congress is just too busy, doesn't have enough time to review all of these programs. Well, quite honestly, if these programs aren't important enough for Congress to take the time to review them to determine whether they should be continued to be funded or if they're relevant today, we probably shouldn't be sending billions of dollars of the taxpayers' money for those programs. And to the argument, well, we're too busy, well, we haven't been too busy in the first 6 months of this Congress. In the first 6 months of this Congress we've authorized \$828 billion in new programs. So if we have time to authorize \$828 billion in new programs, it looks like to me we have time to go through these programs that are going to be funded today in this bill that are unauthorized.

Clearly, Congress needs to do a better job. The first thing Congress needs to do is follow the rules. These were rules that were put in place to put checks and balances on how we spend the American taxpayers' money. And so I would encourage our Members today to vote against this rule and for Congress to follow its own rules, and that is, to make sure that we do not fund unauthorized projects.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, before yielding to my good friend on the Rules Committee, let me clear up something for the American public.

Mr. DICKS and Mr. TIAHRT, in a very responsible manner bringing this appropriations measure to the floor, had to work assiduously to ensure that this is a bipartisan effort and that we are being proper stewards of the environment. There is no question, I don't believe, that anybody can say about that.

But I've listened now for a considerable number of days about the hammering of earmarks. Now, I'm not here as an apologist for anybody, but I think something needs to be understood that is not clear in the minds of many, particularly in the American public because of the confusion that has been put forward by my colleagues on the other side. Let me use as a "for example" in this particular measure some of the so-called earmarks that I say are needed in these communities. And I go specifically to Florida and specifically to Republicans who work on this floor with me.

I support the city of Sarasota's water system placement that Congressman BUCHANAN asks for. I support Congressman CRENSHAW's town of Callahan for the wastewater treatment plant. I support the fourth-ranking member of the Republican Party's request for the city of Brooksville Southwest Florida Water Management District for the Peace and Myakka Rivers. I have fished in those rivers. I have seen them

be damaged. They are nowhere near the district that I am privileged to serve, but I support that particular effort of Congressman PUTNAM.

I support the city of Clearwater for wastewater and reclaimed water infrastructure. I have been in Clearwater when it was flooding and the people had problems in that area. That's offered by Mr. YOUNG, the former appropriations Chair, and Mr. BILIRAKIS. Enough already, colleagues. These people need this environmental protection. They need these water treatment facilities. They need the things that Mr. DICKS and Mr. TIAHRT have worked out. And it's wrong for folks to come down here and to try to give the American public the impression that because somebody that is sent here for the purpose of trying to use the budget for the purposes of protecting the environment and the American people, that they have done something wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Vermont, my good friend who is on the Rules Committee (Mr. WELCH).

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. I thank the gentleman from Florida and for his ringing endorsement of public spending for public projects.

Two things: first, Democrats re-adopted in this Congress the principle of pay-as-you-go, acknowledging that we have to pay our bills, and that good intentions are not enough to balance the budget. We will do that as we did before. But in this bill we are proposing to spend 7.5 percent more than the President asked for. And the reason? That spending is necessary and required if we're going to protect the rivers, the waterways, the air and the land of this great country.

Second, the spirit of Teddy Roosevelt is alive and well in this bipartisan bill by Mr. DICKS and by Mr. TIAHRT. We are getting back into protecting the America that we are responsible to hand down to the future. This bill, a bipartisan bill, appropriates \$266 million for climate change research across all Federal agencies. This bill creates a commission on Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation that will review scientific questions that need to be addressed to adapt to global warming and to recommend action. This investment in furthering our understanding of the impacts of climate change is a down payment on our future. If there has been a debate about whether global warming exists, this bill puts an exclamation point that the bipartisan conclusion of Congress is that global warming is real, is urgent, and requires immediate attention.

The spirit of Teddy Roosevelt is also alive and well in this bill in the Forest Legacy Program. And thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member. The Forest Legacy Program brings communities together, protecting their forests. In my own State, two very small towns of Fairlee and West Fairlee have been working hard contributing their own money to protect

their Brushwood Forest. The increase in the Forest Legacy Program, something that's been overdue, is going to give them a fighting chance to be able to do that.

The spirit of Teddy Roosevelt is alive and well in the bill's commitment to water quality. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides all of our States resources for local sewage treatment projects, one of the most important investments in the country towards public health.

□ 1100

The spirit of Teddy Roosevelt is alive and well in the self-help efforts in this bill in the small amount of money, \$16 million, that provides for rural water technical assistance. This helps small communities across the State of Vermont and across the country get the technical assistance that they need in order to do locally what is required for the benefit of their own citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlemen on both sides of the aisle for their leadership in this overdue legislation.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to engage in a colloquy with my colleague from Washington, the chairman of the subcommittee.

As the chairman is aware, I have been concerned for some time with the issue of Federal land acquisition due to its effect on local tax rolls. Many of the counties that I represent are heavily federally owned. Some of them have strong reservations about Federal land acquisition.

I would like to say a word or two specifically about the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. As the chairman knows, I represent the northeastern part of the scenic area. The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic River Act, passed by Congress in 1986, authorized \$40 million for land acquisition, \$10 million for economic development grants, and \$10 million for recreation grants for the scenic area. I am concerned that even though it has been 20 years since the Act was passed, the economic development and recreation accounts have yet to be fully funded. Meanwhile, the Forest Service has spent more than \$55 million on land acquisition in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. I believe we should make it a priority to fund the economic development and recreation accounts as envisioned under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield to Chairman DICKS for his comments.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I share your interest in seeing that the economic development and recreation accounts under the gorge act are fully funded. I will be happy to work with you on this issue which is so important to the communities in your scenic area.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I appreciate the chairman's remarks. I also

noted that the committee report includes \$1 million for land acquisition in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area requested by our colleagues, Mr. BLUMENAUER of Oregon and Mr. BAIRD of Washington. I would like to clarify with the chairman that it is not his intent that these funds would be spent on land acquisition in the part of the scenic area that I represent.

Again, I would be happy to yield to the chairman on this question.

Mr. DICKS. That is correct. The earmark in the committee report is for land acquisition in areas of the scenic area represented by the two gentlemen who requested the funding.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I thank the chairman. I appreciate very much your comments. I look forward to working with you on issues related to the implementation of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Act.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Rules Committee, by a voice vote, approved an open rule for the consideration of the Department of Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriation Act. I am pleased that this rule keeps with the longstanding tradition of allowing an open debate on spending bills. I support House Resolution 514.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the underlying legislation moves our country in a better direction, providing improvements long overdue to our entire Nation. Our investments today will ensure that our children and grandchildren will have water and air that is cleaner, natural landscapes and historic structures that are protected, and arts and humanity centers that are bolstered.

This bill fulfills past due obligations to our underserved communities and to our entire planet. Republicans in the last Congress and in the current administration have continued to fail to effectively fund the environmental and conservation needs of the American people and its natural resources.

Today, under the Democratic leadership, we are reversing this trend and restoring funding to vital programs and agencies, fulfilling our promise to this Nation and to this Earth. The investments this bill makes are of vital importance today, and their benefits will be felt for years to come.

I urge a "yes" vote on the previous question and on the rule.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2643, and

that I may include tabular material on the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

PERMISSION TO REDUCE TIME FOR ELECTRONIC VOTING DURING CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2643, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that, during consideration of H.R. 2643 pursuant to House Resolution 514, the Chair may reduce to 2 minutes the minimum time for electronic voting under clause 6 of rule XVIII and clauses 8 and 9 of rule XX.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 514 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2643.

The Chair designates the gentleman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and requests the gentleman from New York (Mr. McNULTY) to assume the chair temporarily.

□ 1106

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2643) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008, and for other purposes, with Mr. McNULTY in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Washington (Mr. DICKS) and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I have waited 30 years for the honor of presenting an Interior and Environment bill to the House of Representatives as subcommittee chairman. I am very proud to present H.R. 2643 to the committee as my first Interior appropriations bill.

The bill includes \$27.6 billion for the Department of the Interior, the Envi-

ronmental Protection Agency, the Forest Service, the Indian Health Service and Related Agencies under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. This is an increase of \$1.193 billion over the 2007 enacted level, or about a 4.3 percent increase.

Mr. Chairman, the recommendations reflected in the 2008 Interior bill are the product of a very deliberate and bipartisan process. Our Interior and Environment Subcommittee held 38 separate hearings over 3 months with more than 250 witnesses. The printed record of these hearings is included in eight volumes, totaling over 10,000 pages.

During these hearings, we heard from agency officials, Members of Congress and more than 100 Tribal leaders and other public witnesses. This testimony made it clear that substantial increases in environmental and conservation programs were badly needed. These sessions also highlighted the critical health and education needs in Indian country.

While the Office of Management and Budget and other Members of the House may criticize the overall size of the bill, I do not know of one increase in this package which can't be fully justified based on need or on the ability to spend the money wisely. Frankly, I don't think I have to remind Members that this bill started in a deep hole created more than a decade ago.

As Members have heard me say many times, and as this chart clearly demonstrates, in our hearings and other statements on the floor, between 2000 and 2007, based on OMB's own tables, funding for the Interior Department fell 16 percent in real terms. EPA has been reduced by 29 percent, and the Forest Service nonfire budget by 35 percent when adjusted for inflation. Given that history, I believe the 4.3 percent increase in this bill is well justified.

I might just mention that one of the most important powers that Congress possesses is the power of the purse. This is in the Constitution. This is one of Congress' major authorities and one way we can check the actions of the executive branch.

Now, while I do not go into all the details, a few of the increases and decreases deserve special mention this morning.

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The bill provides a \$223 million increase for our national parks, as proposed by the President, for the 10-year, \$3 billion Centennial Challenge effort to restore the parks for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Park Service in 2016. The additional funds will support 3,000 badly needed new seasonal employees and 590 year-round staff. We also provide \$50 million of discretionary funds for Centennial Challenge projects to be matched by private funds. These funds will support enhancements at our parks beyond the funding necessary for core operations.

We provide a \$56 million increase for our national wildlife refuges, a 14-percent increase above the fiscal year 2007